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S E C R E T OTTAWA 002468

SIPDIS

STATE ALSO FOR DS/IP/WHA, DS/PII, AND DS/ITA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/29/2013

TAGS: PTER ASEC CA

SUBJECT: CANADIAN PRESS REPORTS OF TERROR PROBE HIGHLY

SPECULATIVE

Classified By: BRIAN FLORA, MINISTER-COUNSELOR FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS FO
R REASONS 1.5(B) AND (D).

¶11. (S) Persistent Canadian press reports which surfaced over the weekend and have since been picked up in the U.S. allege that at least some of the 19 foreign "students" arrested recently in Canada (18 Pakistanis and one Indian) have links to al Qaeda and may have been plotting terrorist operations in Canada and the U.S. Contacts of Embassy law enforcement offices have been told that the reports are sensationalist and appear to have little basis in fact. The nineteen detainees, one of whom has since been released, are being held on suspicion of immigration violations. No evidence of terrorist intentions or threats to national security have yet surfaced, though the investigation into their activities is ongoing. Our contacts have assured us that they will share any significant findings with us.

¶12. (S) Last February, several in the group came to the attention of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) fraud investigators, who then initiated an investigation. Most had bogus documents and many claimed to be attending a defunct business school in Toronto. The press alleged that they engaged in a pattern of suspicious behavior (some were seen at a lake near an Ontario nuclear power plant at 4:00 am, another took an extended flying course, few had a visible means of support, several had apparently traveled to the U.S., etc.), but Embassy sources in both the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS) have questioned the accuracy and significance of the press reports, describing them as highly speculative and thus far unproven. Something more serious could turn up for one or more of the detainees as CSIS and the RCMP sift through the evidence, but the most likely explanation for the roundup is immigration fraud.

¶13. (S) Our CSIS and RCMP contacts claim that they were not informed regarding the specifics of the CIC immigration fraud investigation. Once the story broke, they were belatedly given the names and personal data of the nineteen detainees, which they have since shared with us. Until proven otherwise, they see the nineteen as economic migrants who, typically, used fraudulent methods to gain access to Canada. Both organizations have promised to keep us informed as the investigation continues. The RCMP also claims to have drafted a press report to downplay the terrorism angle and reassure the public, but the papers have declined to use the release, preferring instead to continue to speculate on the group's possible terrorist link.

¶14. (S) Comment: It's a slow news period and the Canadian press has decided to take a sexy story and run with it. We assume the press blowup came as the result of a leak from one or more of the CIC investigators, who may have been trying to promote their own reputations. Responsible journalism it is not, but it attracts attention and seems to sell newspapers.

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